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Stag 'bum rgyal སྐལ་བཟང་རྒྱལ་. 2012. *Rgud རྒྱུད* [*Degeneration*]. Zi ling ཟི་ལིང་ [Xining 西宁]: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang མཚོ་སྒྲོན་མི་རིགས་དཔེ་སྐྱུར་ཁང་། [Qinghai Nationalities Press].

INTRODUCTION

Stag 'bum rgyal (b.1966) has authored an impressive number of literary works. After graduating from Mtsho lho mi rigs dge thon slob grwa 'Mtsho lho Prefecture Junior Teacher's Institute for Nationalities' in 1986, he began teaching in the same year in his home area of Sum mdo (Senduo), Mang ra (Guinan) County, Mtsho lho (Hainan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province. From 1988 to 1990, he studied at the Northwest Institute for Nationalities in Lanzhou City. Afterwards, he returned to his home region and became a Tibetan language teacher at Mangra County Nationalities Middle School. Since 1987, he has published more than seventy short stories and novels in various Tibetan language magazines.

Stag 'bum rgyal's first novel, *Lhing 'jags kyi rtswa thang 'The Silent Grassland'* was published by Mtsho sngon Nationalities Press in 1999. It had been previously published in several installments by the literary magazine *Sbrang char 'Light Rain'* under the title *Rnam shes 'Consciousness'*. Considered the first Tibetan novel by a writer from Mtsho sngon Province, it was honored in the Second *Light Rain* Literary Awards.

He has won several awards for his short stories and novels, including the annual award by Renmin Wenxue 'People's Literature' for his story *Mi tshe'i glu dbyang 'Lifetime Song'* in 2011 and the Junmajiang 'Junma Award', the most prestigious literature award for ethnic minorities in China, for the novel *Kha ba med pa'i dgun kha*

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'*The Winter Without Snow*' in 2016. His most recent publication, *Bgres po dang nor khyu 'The Old Man and His Yak Herd'*, a collection of short stories, was published in 2016. His novel *Degeneration* won the fourth Sbrang char Literature Award and the fifth Prize for Literary and Artistic Creation in Mtsho sngon.¹

Nineteen of the author's short stories have been translated into Chinese and are available in Debenjia (2012) and Wanma Caidan (2016).² Zhaba (Bkra bha), a writer himself and Stag 'bum rgyal's longtime friend and former classmate, writes:

"Who is Debenjia (Stag 'bum rgyal)? What are people's comments about him? In the eyes of childish students, he is a good-mannered Tibetan language teacher...; in the eyes of ordinary people, Debenjia is a drinker, an excessive smoker...; in the eyes of women, his wife married a man who is actually married to literature; in my eyes and those of other pen friends, Debenjia is a leading writer in his native language (Wanma Caidan, 2012:297).

Zhaba goes on to express regret that Stag 'bum rgyal has written materials that were lost, e.g., a well-written manuscript in a magical-realist style was lost during the time his friends were reading it, and the half-completed manuscript of yet another novel was eaten by a cow that wandered into the writer's house while he was outside drinking (Wanma Caidan, 2012:300). In the end, Zhaba hopes Stag 'bum rgyal will drink less, eat more, and live well so that his creations will become an important part of contemporary Tibetan literature (Wanma Caidan, 2012:304).

¹ *Degeneration* won the Sbrang char Literature Award the fourth time it was given and the Prize for Literary and Artistic Creation the fifth time it was awarded.

² Some of the same stories appear in both volumes.

STAG 'BUM RGYAL'S NOVELS

Stag 'bum rgyal's prolific writings have attracted commentary. Most of his over seventy published writings are short stories and novellas. His short stories, particularly the "dog series," have been well received by readers and have been the subject of a number of reviews. 'Brong bu rdo rje rin chen (2016), Bsod nams rgyal (2006), and Khyung thar rgyal (2016) have focused on the writer's "dog" short stories. A bu (2015) has also contributed some paragraphs related to the same topic. In contrast, the writer's two novels, *Lhing 'jags kyi rtswa thang* 'The Silent Grassland' and *Rgud 'Degeneration* have drawn less attention.

Lhag pa chos 'phel et al. (2017) give a detailed introduction to the author's first novel *Lhing 'jags kyi rtswa thang* (172-181), and Robin (2009-2010) and Hartley and Schiaffini-Vedani (2008) briefly introduce Stag 'bum rgyal. Robin comments:

Social realism, favored by writers based in the Tibet Autonomous Region, as we have seen, is also practiced by some Amdo writers and includes early works like *The Serene Meadow* [*The Silent Grassland*] (*Lhing 'jags kyi rtswa thang*, 1999) by Takbum Gyel (Stag 'bum rgyal, b.1966), the second longest Tibetan novel with 588 pages (print run 1500). It chronicles the conflict between modernity and tradition in the Tibetan grasslands through the story of a herders' family. The most recently published novel belongs to this genre, although it verges on the fantastic due to its intricate structure (35).

Ban de mkhar (2014) has edited a collection of reviews (ten in Tibetan and nine in Chinese) devoted to Stag 'bum rgyal's writings that are the products of a seminar centered on the writer's oeuvre at the Central University for Nationalities in Beijing in October 2012. Also included is a small reference to *Degeneration* in which Ljags rdor rgyal (2014) remarks:

Although *Degeneration* is not a historical novel by category, it chooses events set in the past and has certain characteristics of a historical novel; therefore, the author has failed to write a story based on one main character as modern novels usually do (15).

Dgon bkra shis don grub's (2015) Master's thesis is exclusively devoted to Stag 'bum rgyal's novels. The author writes that Stag 'bum rgyal generally concentrates on ugly social phenomena and a yearning for a better society and improved human behavior, but fails to create vivid characters (168-169). As with most other reviewers, only scattered comments are found on *Degeneration*.

Dpal ldan rgya mtsho et al. (2013) provide the only review I found exclusively devoted to *Degeneration*. It consists of conversations between five teachers and students from Kan su'u mi rigs dge thon slob gling 'Gansu Nationalities Teacher's Institute' in Gtso (Hezuo) City. Each discusses the novel from a specific aspect such as structure, the factors explaining degeneration, gender relationships, servility, and so on. For instance:

In philosophy, the rise and fall of anything has external and internal factors, and they are inter-connected. Today's topic-(the novel) *Degeneration* - has the same feature. The story reveals the historical wounds of degeneration due to a lack of harmony caused by external and internal factors. Although the story is novel-length, it has a clear order and tight structure and, therefore, the external and internal factors are clearly presented and compiled, including internal conflict between the tribal chief and his wife reflecting the external conflicts between the three tribes; and along with the conflicts of the three tribes, another conflict with Warlord Ma's forces, an alien, totally foreign culture and tradition. The story's conflicts reach a climax following such tortuous story lines (180).

CHARACTERS

The novel recounts relationships between three Tibetan tribes sharing one ancestor namely, the Spyang tsha, Gser tsha, and Gling tsha tribes, and members of Ma's military. The characters in the figure below appear in the novel:

FIG 1. Characters in *Degeneration*.

Tribe/ Organization	Name	Detail
Spyang tsha Tribe	Nyi bzang	Chief
	Bkra mtsho	Chief's wife, sister of the Gser tsha Tribe chief
	G.yu rtse	Nyi bzang's son
	Chos dbyangs	Spyang tsha Monastery incarnate <i>bla ma</i>
	Sna dmar 'Red Nose'	Chief's family manager
	Tshe lo	Servant, A ma Dbang mo's son (Nyi bzang's secret son)
	A ma dbang mo	Servant, Tshe lo's mother
	Kun skyid	Servant, Tshe lo's wife
	Rin chen	Servant, bandit
	Nor 'bum	Servant, bandit, Rin chen's partner
Gser tsha Tribe	Lha seng	Chief
	Snying bha	Chief's elder son
	Ban te byams	Chief's younger son
	Gser tsha lama	Incarnate <i>blama</i> at Gser tsha Monastery
	Lha mo sgrol ma	From Gling tsha, married to a Gser tsha tribesman, later becomes Rin chen's wife
Gling tsha Tribe	Tshe dpal rgyal	Chief
Warlord Ma	Khe pa Ma ne	Muslin "merchant", Ma's agent
	M+'a yus po	Head of troops dispatched to the pasturelands by Chairman Ma in Zi ling (Xining)

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The story is set during Ma Bufang's (1903-1975) rule of Mtsho sngon Province during the Republic of China (1912-1949). This notorious Muslim warlord brutally ruled Mtsho sngon Province for about forty years and caused much pain and fear among local people, particularly Tibetan Buddhists (Chen 1986: 202-234).

The novel gives an account of Ma holding the reincarnation of Gser tsha Bla ma hostage in order to extort large sums of silver from the Gser tsha Tribe, echoing Ma's actions with regard to the fourteenth Dalai Lama as reported by Chen (2007:84-85) and Goldstein (1989:314-24).

STORYLINE

The story starts with Sku lha g.yag rgyal sending his three sons to different places one auspicious day. They are told to return with what they find. The oldest son brings back a golden bell, the second one returns with a bamboo flute, and the youngest one has a she-wolf's tail. The father delightedly announces that they will become the heads of the Gser tsha Tsang, Gling tsha Tsang, and Spyang tsha Tsang¹ tribes, and further interprets their findings very positively. The golden bell signifies that Gser tsha Tsang will become the birthplace of the great *Bla ma*, the bamboo flute portends Gling tsha Tsang will enjoy an impressive reputation, and the wolf tail foretells Spyang tsha Tsang will flourish and be invincible. The father tells his sons to maintain a good relationship, support each other, fight enemies together, and avoid infighting. The proverb *lug pho gnyis kyis gdog gtugs na, mgo khrag a ce wa mos ldag* "when two rams butt heads, the fox enjoys the blood from their heads" foreshadows what will happen later.

The real story starts many years afterwards. While Bkra mtsho enjoys a leisurely life at home, Nyi bzang (her husband and the Spyang

¹ *Gser*, *Gling*, and *Spyang* respectively mean 'gold', 'flute', and 'wolf'. *Tsa* translates as 'nephew' or 'future generation', and *tsang* means 'family' or 'tribe'.

tsha tribal chief) and their son, G.yu rtse, return from pilgrimage to Sku 'bum (Ta'er). With them is the Muslin "merchant," Khe pa Ma ne 'Merchant Ma ne'. He is sent by the warlord Ma Bufang to be a "guest" of the Spyang tsha Tribe. In fact, Nyi bzang's true reason for visiting Zi ling was to purchase arms from Ma Bufang. The chief hides this secret from his wife - the sister of the Gser tsha Tribe chief. Nevertheless, Bkra mtsho finds this out and interprets this as distrust, straining their already fraught relationship.

Tension arises between the tribes over land disputes after Ma interferes to "settle quarrels" among them. In the past, the tribes settled disagreements among themselves through traditional mediation. However, after the Zi ling government gave the tribal chiefs the title of heads of "a thousand families" and drew clear border boundaries for each tribe, each tribe secretly purchases arms from Ma to strengthen their own power, which is exactly what Ma intended.

Meanwhile, Khe pa Ma ne stays in the Spyang tsha Tribe as a "guest" and shows no sign of leaving.

Spyang tsha was once the strongest and most influential among the three tribes while the other two showed respect toward them. After the Zi ling government establishes its authority and bestows titles, the Spyang tsha Chief feels his status is challenged, motivating his purchase of arms.

Tshe lo, a talented servant, is a favorite of the Spyang tsha chief, who praises him extravagantly. This makes G.yu rtse, the chief's son who grew up with Tshe lo, jealous. The head arranges a marriage between Tshe lo and a pretty servant, Kun skyid, who also loves her new husband. The chief's son is also in love with her, but he cannot express these feelings on account of their different social classes.

The tribal chief gives Tshe lo a rifle and tells him to herd sheep on the land that formerly belonged to Spyang tsha, but is now claimed by the Gser tsha Tribe on the basis of a paper authorized by Ma Bufang's government in Zi ling. When Tshe lo herds the animals, he encounters Lha mo sgrol ma, a young woman from the Gling tsha Tribe who is now married to an abusive Gser tsha man. They have a quick sexual encounter.

One day when a servant is tending the sheep on behalf of Tshe lo, some Gser tsha men attack and take half of the sheep. Spyang tsha

immediately prepares to take revenge. Egged on by Khe pa Ma ne, Spyang tsha sends troops to bring back the sheep by force. Tshe lo, unable to cross a rising river, is captured by Gser tsha men during the fight. G.yu rtse brings the troops back with the stolen sheep. His father criticizes him for not rescuing Tshe lo. G. yu rtse's hate towards Tshe lo only worsens.

The Spyang tsha chief, Nyi bzang, gathers his troops again to attack Gser tsha for detaining Tshe lo, but Tshe lo returns unharmed. During Tshe lo's arrest, he experiences much humiliation from Lha seng's two sons, but Lha mo sgrol ma secretly helps him. The Gser tsha chief Lha seng eventually releases Tshe lo and returns his belongings (horse and gun). He also sends a message to Nyi bzang, asking that they reaffirm the harmonious relationship they previously enjoyed as relatives. But this is rejected by G.yu rtse, the Spyang tsha chief's son, who says their rival is afraid of their new rifles.

Tragedy ensues. G.yu rtse, eager to show off his courage, dies during a gunfight. Soon, Lha seng sends Tshe dpal rgyal (the Gling tsha Tribe chief) to mediate. Subsequently, the Gser tsha Tribe pays silver and livestock in compensation and creates a document stipulating that "Ma mo gong kha," the disputed place, belongs to the Spyang tsha Tribe. These negotiations take place in tents pitched in the border area. A dangerous conflict is thus concluded, but only temporarily.

Nyi bzang's men triumphantly return home from the conflict mediation and find that Bkra mtsho has run off with Khe pa Ma ne. Tshe lo immediately pursues them on horseback. Khe pa Ma ne is stripped naked and released, while Bkra mtsho is brought back to her husband. Nyi bzang goes out of his tent to receive her, and surprisingly, says nothing about her departure.

A troop of soldiers dispatched by Warlord Ma in Zi ling arrives on the grassland and pitch their tents at the border of Spyang tsha and Gser tsha territory. The brutal commander, M+'a yus po, asks the two tribal chiefs to the tent for land dispute mediation. Khe pa Ma ne, now a junior commander, is also there. The Gser tsha Tribe chief's two sons are aligned with Ma and want to pressure the Spyang tsha Tribe.

At the mediation meeting, M+'a yus po announces that both sides must give many horses and a large sum of silver to the Zi ling government in compensation for the land dispute that the two tribes

created. This is a common device used by Ma to exploit those he governs. M+'a yus po also announces that Ma mo gong kha now belongs to Gser tsha, a decision that cannot be altered.

Nevertheless, Nyi bzang rejects this. Provoked, M+'a yus po reaches for his pistol. Displaying courage and shooting skill, Tshe lo shoots the pistol out of M+'a yus po's hand. The Spyang tsha head departs with his men, leaving the Zi ling soldiers and their leader furious and humiliated. Unwilling to give up, M+'a yus po marches his and Gser tsha's troops through Spyang tsha territory. When they reach a mountain pass on the border, they are stopped by Tshe lo and his two friends, Rin chen and Nor 'bum. Forced to retreat to Gser tsha territory, the Gser tsha chief's sons prepare some special treatment for Ma's troops.

Meantime, the Spyang tsha Tribe manager, Sna dmar, is making plans. His newborn son is designated as the reincarnation of Gser tsha Bla ma and Sna dmar is reluctant to tell his master due to the relationship between the two tribes. Sna dmar tries to contact Ma secretly in order to get "official approval" from the warlord Ma's government in Zi ling for his son to be the reincarnate lama. Ma Bufang is "concerned" about the reincarnate as well.

Later, M+'a yus po returns to the grassland with larger troops and asks all three tribe chiefs for a meeting. This time, he asks the tribes to send troops to assist Ma's troops in fighting against the advancing Communist troops. While the other two tribes readily obey the order, the Spyang tsha head sends troops reluctantly and orders them to avoid any real engagement in the fight. Tshe lo brings them back safely while the troops of the other two tribes suffer greatly in the snowstorm. Tshe lo proves his talent one more time.

Ma Bufang does not stop his plotting. A message comes to Spyang tsha. The sons of the heads of the Ma and Gser tsha tribes accuse Tshe lo, Rin chen, and Nor 'bum from Spyang tsha of stealing fifty horses that Gser tsha has offered to Ma as payment for the previous land dispute between the Spyang tsha and Gser tsha tribes. Ma's troops are preparing to attack Spyang tsha again. Rin chen disappears. Nor 'bum refuses to flee as he needs to take care of his mother and sister. Tshe lo is forced to hide in the mountain.

Rin chen, a wanderer and Tshe lo's peer in the Spyang tsha Tribe, brings home a new wife. Tshe lo visits Rin chen's house to congratulate him, but surprisingly finds that the woman is Lha mo sgrol ma. Rin chen reads that something is wrong from the eyes of his new wife and Tshe lo. A seed of distrust is planted in Rin chen's mind towards Tshe lo, which will become a turning point as the story evolves.

During his exile, Tshe lo sees Lha mo sgrol ma arrested by Ma's troops. Now she is Rin chen's wife. Tshe lo saves her from Ma's military tents and finds that Ma's troops have gone to attack his home during night. He and Lha mo sgrol ma go after Ma's troops.

Some households in Spyang tsha are attacked that night. Several people, including Nor 'bum, are killed. Tribal elders now accuse Tshe lo of being the cause of this latest tragedy. Tshe lo learns that Nor 'bum was actually arrested by his own people and offered to Ma's troops in exchange for peace. Tshe lo is asked to surrender for the same purpose. He refuses and flees. Ma's troops return to the tribe frequently to search for Tshe lo.

The Spyang tsha tribe manager, Sna dmar, returns in poor spirits. His wife has died and his son, the reincarnate *bla ma* is in Ma's custody. More bad news arrives. Khe pa Ma ne's troops take Bla ma Chos dbyangs as a hostage. Nyi bzang goes to Khrika (Guide) to save his *bla ma*. En route, they meet Tshe lo bringing the corpse of the *bla ma* who was killed by the Khri ka City governor for refusing to be a puppet of Ma Bufang.

While Spyang tsha holds a funeral for Bla ma Chos dbyangs, news arrives from Gser tsha. Now the Spyang tsha manager Sna dmar's son, who is the new reincarnate *bla ma* of the Gser tsha Tribe, is being held by Ma, who demands huge sums of silver for the boy's release.

The Gser tsha chief's two sons, Snying bha and Ban te byams, start to charge their people large amounts of tax to collect the ransom. This causes a breakup of the tribe as some households choose to leave in order to avoid the tax. The chief, Lha seng, dies in sorrow as he witnesses his two sons becoming intimate with M+'a yus po.

The Spyang tsha chief's wife, Bkra mtsho, was eager for her own son to be the next head, but after his death, she gives birth to a daughter. Worried that her husband will give his position to Tshe lo, she insists on going on a pilgrimage. The couple takes a small

entourage that includes Tshe lo's wife, Kun skyid. They are stopped by Khe pa Ma ne at the bridge checkpoint outside the county town of Khri ka, which is occupied by Ma's troops. Nyi bzang is taken to see the local governor, who killed Bla ma Chos dbyangs. The chief is asked to agree that the new reincarnate *bla ma* of Gser tsha will be the religious leader of both Gser tsha and Spyang tsha tribes and that Bla ma Chos dbyangs's reincarnation should not be installed.

Nyi bzang agrees. The governor's men arrest him and force him to drink liquor to make him drunk. After suffering great humiliation, Nyi bzang is shot and killed by Khe pa Ma ne.

Tshe lo, who served as Nyi bzang's protector, learns of this. He also learns that his wife, Kun skyid, as well as the chief's wife and son jumped into the river to escape arrest. Tshe lo learns that it was Rin chen who revealed Nyi bzang's pilgrimage schedule, which led to the latter's arrest and death.

Now the story comes to the end. Tshe lo points his pistol at Rin chen's head. "Why did you do this? Where did such hatred come from between us friends? We should be united instead."

Rin chen laughs, "Brothers!? What is brotherhood? Should anyone take a brother's wife?"

"You totally misunderstood. Let me explain."

"No. I need no explanation. What I want is revenge. I betrayed the Tribe Chief in order to take revenge on you. Didn't the Chief appreciate you?"

This is a terrible blow to Tshe lo, who lowers his gun. Rin chen quickly takes a pistol from his pocket and points it at Tshe lo's head and then a gunshot rings out and Rin chen collapses. Tshe lo sees Lha mo sgrol ma, holding a rifle behind Rin chen, her husband.

The story ends.

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The story revolves around the disunity between tribes, which Ma Bufang cunningly exploits. These internal and external factors explain the degeneration of all of the tribes, which is accelerated by Ma's military and his sale of weapons. This theme is introduced at the beginning of the novel.

The marriage between the Nyi bzang and Bkra mtsho is an example of internal conflicts. While Nyi bzang ponders how to

maintain his power and influence among the tribes, his wife Bkra mtsho wishes to secure her position in the tribe by making sure their only son G.yu rtse inherits the chief's position. However, the son is killed by his maternal brother's tribe. Their next child is a girl, who cannot be chief. Bkra mtsho, with excessive sadness due to the deaths of her son and brother, and perhaps also tired of the hopeless situation facing her, insists that the family go on pilgrimage to Sku 'bum Monastery despite the unrest outside. All members of the entire family lose their lives in the hands of warlord Ma's people. Up to this point, readers most possibly blame Bkra mtsho for her selfishness and stupid decision to go on pilgrimage at the wrong-time. She is depicted as a controversial character with imperfections.

The romantic relationship between Tshe lo and Lha mo sgrol ma provides another lens through which to view the story. Tshe lo, a servant of the Spyang tsha tribe chief Nyi bzang's family (the chief is his biological father but this relationship is unknown in the tribe, even to Tshe lo himself), is to marry Kun skyid, a female servant in the tribe. But he meets Lha mo sgrol ma and they have secret relationship. Later, they save each other's lives during dangerous moments. Although their relationship is never deeply developed under the author's pen, it has a severe consequence at the end.

Such a romantic yet tragic relationship adds another vividly illustrated twist to the story. These descriptions again bear witness to Stag 'bum rgyal's skills at storytelling.

Stag 'bum rgyal's novels have been criticized for a lack of vividness in the characters they present. In *Degeneration*, the author uses both direct and indirect characterization to create diverse characters.

Nyi bzang is a charismatic figure, both wise and courageous. Despite his effort to maintain the status of the most powerful tribe, he loses his life at the end due to the many layers of internal and external disunity and conflicts, factors which compound the "degeneration" of his tribe.

Tshe lo is another main character in this story. Born to a low-status family, he is depicted as an almost perfect heroic character, clever and brave, a skillful marksman, loyal to his master, and even with leadership ability. In attempting to protect the Spyang tsha

Tribes' chief and tribal interests, he seems always able to change dangerous and unfavorable situations into more favorable ones. He almost loses his life to his friend Rin chen, but the author does not want his hero to die at the end. However, he too is unable to revert the "degeneration" of the tribe.

A few female characters play roles in this story. Bkra mtsho, the Spyang tsha tribe chief's wife, has an important role in the Spyang tsha Tribe, but her short-sighted dreams conflict with her husband's vision. She is a character with inner conflicts. As a mother, she hopes that her son becomes the future chieftain. She is jealous of Tshe lo when her husband shows appreciation towards this servant's talent and bravery. As the sister of a rival tribe's chief, she wishes her brother well, but in a critical moment, she sides with her son to prompt the Spyang tsha troops to attack her brother's tribe, perhaps to prove her loyalty towards her husband's tribe. Her only son, in whom she has invested everything, dies in a conflict with her brother's tribe. Hopeless and desperate, she chooses to flee with Khe pa Ma ne, the foreign "guest" brought by her husband. This is a most insulting betrayal of her husband. But to the reader's great surprise, Nyi bzang shows no signs of anger or hatred towards her. Instead, he goes out of the tent to meet her when she is brought back by Tshe lo. In the end, this couple dies at the hands of Khe pa Ma ne, once a "guest" of the Spyang tsha Tribe.

Another female character, Lha mo sgrol ma, has no better luck. She is depicted as a woman with a certain rebellious attitude towards the male-dominated society. She is forced to marry a man from a different tribe and suffers from her husband's maltreatments. Later she becomes Rin chen's wife. But this restless woman envies Tshe lo, a heroic man from a rival tribe and tries to tie her fate to him. Her secret relationship with Tshe lo becomes another cause for the "degeneration" of the Spyang tsha Tribe.

Whether the author has successfully created the characters in this novel will vary for different readers. In my view, the author has failed to create a single major character throughout this story. Instead, several parallel characters are created as the story evolves.

Bdud lha rgyal (2016) writes in a review of the novel *Nga Yi A Pha Gnyis* 'My Two Fathers' by Tshe ring don grub:

In my opinion, the contents of most of his novels represent objective history and reality. Although there is no doubt that such stories can bring back past memories and raise concerns about those realities, they also give voice to unspoken things existing both objectively and in people's memories. But if focus is put on stories instead of characters, there is danger that the characters will be lost in the process of writing stories and recording facts; it particularly may fail to touch human nature and the depth of the inner world (144).

Although the above comment is not made about *Degeneration*, it applies equally well, reflecting that characterization in novel writing is a weakness of many Tibetan writers.

What is it about human nature that has led to *Degeneration*? How successfully has the author answered this question? While tribal disunity and the intrusion of external forces are obvious factors, what roles do women and love play? In a whirlwind of social unrest, what choices does a woman, a mother, a wife, have? Are they additional causes for degeneration, or its victims? Characters would be more realistic, generate more understanding and empathy if their inner worlds had been developed in the novel.

Degeneration realistically portrays a certain historical background, the events of which have painfully scarred Amdo Tibetans. The novel sets the tragic fates of many individuals against a period of social and political turmoil touching on factors such as tribal management, tribal relationships, pastureland disputes, arranged marriages, gender relations, and how religious institutions (monasteries) and personnel (*bla ma*) influence people's decisions within the established social structure. By revealing past tragedies and their causes, the author reminds readers to learn from and prevent their repetition.

Though I have never met Stag 'bum rgyal, I admire him for being a middle school teacher in a relatively rural area who writes about ordinary life and ordinary people, and who continues to write. In his numerous works, he reveals various social problems without reluctance and yearns for a better society. Readers interested in the contemporary history, social structure, and ethnic traditions of Mtsho

sngon Tibetans in the period portrayed, as well as those interested in modern Tibetan literature, will find this novel valuable.

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- འབུམ་རྒྱལ་གྱི་སྤྱང་གཏམ་ལ་འབྲུག་ཙམ་ལ། [A Brief Look at Stag 'bum rgyal's Novels with Modern Eyes] in Ban de mkhar བན་དེ་མཁར། (ed) *Stag 'bum rgyal gyi sgrung gtam la dpyal pa* ལྷག་འབུམ་རྒྱལ་གྱི་སྤྱང་གཏམ་ལ་དཔྱད་པ། [Studies of Stag 'bum rgyal's Novels]. Zi ling ཟི་ལིང་།: Mtsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun khang མཚོ་སྒྲོན་མི་རིགས་དཔེ་སླུལ་ཁང་། [Mtsho sngon Nationalities Press].
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NON-ENGLISH TERMS

'brong bu rdo rje rin chen འབྲོང་བུ་རྡོ་རྗེ་རིན་ཆེན།

a bu ཨ་བུ།

a ma dbang mo ཨ་མ་དབང་མོ།

a mdo ཨ་མདོ།

ban de mkhar བན་དེ་མཁར།

ban te byams བན་དེ་བྱམས།

bdud lha rgyal བདུད་ལྷ་རྒྱལ།

Beijing 北京

bgres po dang nor khyu བགེས་པོ་དང་ནོར་ཁྱུ།

bkra bha བརྒ་བཞ།

bkra mtsho བརྒ་མཚོ།

bsod nams rgyal བསོད་ནམས་རྒྱལ།

Chen Bingyuan 陈秉渊

Chengdu 成都

chos skyong ཚོས་སྟོང་།

debenjia 德本加

dgon bkra shis don grub དགོན་བརྒ་ཤིས་དོན་གུབ།

dpal ldan rgya mtsho དཔལ་ལྷན་རྒྱ་མཚོ།

g.yu rtse གཡུ་རྩེ།

gling tsha གླིང་ཚ།

gser tsha གསེར་ཚ།

gtso གཙོ།

Hezuo 合作

Gesang Nuobu 格桑诺布

Guide 贵德

Guinan 贵南

Hainan 海南

Junmajiang 骏马奖

kha ba med pa'i dgun kha ཁ་བམེད་པའི་དགུན་ཁ།

khe pa ma ne ཁེ་པ་མ་ནེ།

khri ka ཁྲི་ཀ།

kh rin tu'u ཁྲིན་ཏུ་འུ།

kun skyid ཀུན་སྟིད།

lan gru ལན་གུ།

Lanzhou 兰州

lha mo sgrol ma ལྷ་མོ་སྒྲོལ་མ།

lha seng ལྷ་སེང་།

lhing 'jags kyi rtswa thang ལྷིང་འཇགས་ཀྱི་རྩ་བང་།

Ma Bufang 马步芳

M+'a yus po མ་ཡུས་པོ།

ma mo gong kha མ་མོ་གོང་ཁ།

mang ra མང་ར།

mi rab sgsum gyi rmi lam མི་རབས་གསུམ་གྱི་མི་ལམ།

mi tshe'i glu dbyang མི་ཚེ་འི་གླུ་དབྱངས།

mtsho lho མཚོ་ལྷོ།

mtsho lho mi rigs dge thon slob grwa མཚོ་ལྷོ་མི་རིགས་དག་གོ་བོན་སློབ་གྲུ།

mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྒོན།

nya yi a pha gnyis འཕྲི་ཡི་ཤ་གཉིས།

nor'bum རོར་འབུམ།

nyi bzang ཉི་བཟང་།

Renmin Wenxue 人民文学

Qinghai 青海

rdo rje don grub རོ་རྩེ་དོན་གྲུབ།

rgud རྒུད།

rin chen རིན་ཆེན།

rnam shes རྣམ་ཤེས།

sbrang char སྤང་ཅར།

Senduo 森多

skal bzang nor bu སྐལ་བཟང་རོར་བུ།

sku 'bum སྐུ་འབུམ།

sku lha g.yag rgyal སྐུ་ལྷ་གཡག་རྒྱལ།

sna dmar སྤང་མར།

snying bha སྤྲིང་བྱ།

spyang tsha སྤྲེང་ཅ།

stag 'bum rgyal སྐུ་མ་འབུམ་རྒྱལ།

sum mdo སུམ་མདོ།

tshe lo ཚེ་ལོ།

tshe dpal rgyal ཚེ་དཔལ་རྒྱལ།

tshe ring don grub ཚེ་རིང་དོན་གྲུབ།

Wanma Caidan 万玛才旦

Xining 西宁

Zhaba 扎巴

zi ling ཟི་ལིང་།